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SOCIETY FOR INFORMATION DISPLAY

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Wednesday, May 27, 12:15-1:45 P.M.

GEORGIAN ROOM

LUNCHEON

Luncheon Speaker: Theodor H. Nelson, President
The Nelson Organization, Inc.
458 West 20th Street
New York City, New York 10011

Zapp, Shazam, and Zowie; How I Hope to

Eliminate Books in the Computer Age

Computers are the ultimate Rorschach, reflecting our fears and visions of the good. A man who says computers are rigid and narrow may well be a rigid and narrow person.

Because of this play in the concept, there has been much of what I would call cybercrud, putting things over on people using computers.

With the opposite intention I propose the term "fantics" for the art and science of presentation, with the understanding that it is with the help of computers that we can now best write, think and show. The main precepts of fantics would seem to be making things look right, feel good, and come across clearly.

New presentational media are now possible, the hyper-media, which extend and go far beyond the media we have known till now. Branching or performing presentations at dynamic display screens, the hyper-media will include hypertexts (branching and performing forms of writing), hyperfilms, hyperpoetry, hypercomics, and so on.

Hypertexts will emerge as CRT's spread out: we will begin to send each other not just text in sequence, but clusters of text and information, with carefully arranged links between their parts. To fly through hypertexts at a CRT will be as important a new experience as it once was to read books printed with moveable type.

Hypertext will appear on screens, but will be written, designed and edited by human beings for clarity, interest and appeal. And this is not unnatural: hypertext is the multi-dimensional extension of writing. We've been speaking hypertext all our lives and never known it.

At last we can shape machines to fit our thoughts, rather than the reverse, assigning to data at least the complexity it has in our minds.

For various reasons, but mainly because hypertexts will be much better than books, I predict that hypertexts will begin to take hold as a serious industry within the coming decade, and within this century largely supplant the printed word as we know it.

For this to take place we must work on screen conventions, data structures, feeder networks, transmission and useage packeting, copyright, billing and handshake conventions, and much more.

This can be the age of mind over matter; of no more pencils, no more books, no more teachers' dirty looks.

Theodor H. Nelson

Theodor H. Nelson received the B.A. in Philosophy from Swarthmore College and the M.A. in Sociology from Harvard College. He has been working in the area of "fantics" and hypertext for the past 10 years.

He was in charge of computer research at Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc. and has been a consultant to Bell Telephone Laboratories, Inc. at Whippany, New Jersey and to CBS Laboratories at Stamford, Connecticut.

Mr. Nelson is now President of The Nelson Organization, Inc. where he is engaged in two major projects. The first is Xanadu, an extreme text system and the second is Fantasm, a fourth generation graphics processor.